

# from Animals & World Religions

## Introduction

From the standpoint of religious traditions, what is our rightful role with regard to red-winged blackbirds and short-eared lizards? What do sacred teachings tell us about our responsibilities to bluefin tuna and Black Angus cattle?

Humans often dominate and exploit other creatures. Contemporary factory farming, for example, causes acute suffering, prolonged misery, and premature death to billions of nonhuman animals every year, across continents, on behalf of those who choose to eat animal products. From factory farms to medical laboratories, individuals from nonhuman species have become objects for our purposes, and means to human ends. Technology, mass production, and the sheer number of flesh-eating humans crowded onto this planet have increased the volume and intensity of nonhuman animal exploitation exponentially. Most of us never see the creatures whom we dominate and exploit, their dark eyes and steamy breath, wavy hair or intricate feathers, swaying tails or shiny beaks. We do not have the chance to know them as individuals—their preferences and fears, affections and curiosities—we see only a slab of flesh wrapped in cellophane, a bit of dairy in a plastic container, with an obscure label that fails to mention the truth: This that you eat is part of someone else's body.

In the seventies and eighties, philosophers Tom Regan and Peter Singer exposed the horrors of the slaughterhouse and the cruelty of animal laboratories, noting that humans could get along quite well without these cruel animal exploiting institutions. Using carefully considered philosophical arguments, Regan and Singer demonstrated that our exploitation of other creatures is morally/ethically inadmissible.

Forty years later, there is much greater awareness of nonhuman animal exploitation, but little has changed in the food, fur, and research industries. In fact, the number of factory-farmed creatures has increased exponentially—we are consuming even more animal products. Why have people failed to respond to philosophical truths, to carefully consider moral imperatives presented by learned contemporary ethicists? Why have institutions of cruelty thrived in spite of increased exposure and consequently, a growing voice of moral condemnation?

Unfortunately, human beings “have been slow to pick up on the logic-based arguments provided by philosophy” (Foltz, *Animals*, 1). Perhaps many people have not responded because they are motivated more by faith, spirituality, and/or

religious convictions than by logic or moral philosophy. For people, who focus primarily on religions beliefs, “an argument based on the sources of religious tradition will be more convincing than one that is not” (Foltz, *Animals*, 3).

As it turns out, the world’s great religious teachings concur with Regan and Singer—we ought not to be exploiting nonhumans as we do in our animal industries. Unfortunately, “people are usually only partially aware of what is taught” by their inherited religious traditions, and we tend to be “highly selective” as to which aspects of our sacred teachings and writings we are familiar with—and those that we practice (Foltz, *Animals*, 4). Reading sacred literature, examining spiritual teachings, and pondering the lives of great religious adepts can remind people of time-honored spiritual principles and provide insights into the human being’s proper place in the universe.

Karl Jaspers referred to the great religious awakenings that took place in various places around the world in the first millennium BCE<sup>1</sup> as the Axial Age. At this time, the world’s largest contemporary religions were formed, and morality—how we behave—was placed “at the heart of the spiritual life” in the religions that originated in India, China, and the Middle East (Armstrong, xii, xiv). The taproot of this religious/moral framework is compassion; compassionate action became the *essence* of religious practice during the Axial Age (Armstrong, xiv). The great sages of that time, who formed each of today’s major religions, placed compassion, generosity, kindness, charity, benevolence, inclusiveness—the empathic life—at the core of religious teachings and practice. These sages taught that respect for the lives of all beings was the *essence* of religion (Armstrong, xiv–xv).

Scholar and author Kimberley Patton (Harvard Divinity), when asked in a recent interview, commented that “religious traditions contain extremely long and rich and ancient commentaries on the topic of animals. They are very interested in animals as existential beings. And this goes back centuries, millennia even” (Patton, 30). She notes that every religious tradition provides followers with “very rich resources for seeing animals more as theological subjects than as objects,” and that contemporary mainstream responses, which ignore the desperate plight of non-human animals,<sup>2</sup> “are largely ignoring their own heritages” (Patton, 30). Author,

<sup>1</sup> BCE indicates “before the common era”; CE indicates “of the common era.” While this time reference is synonymous with the Christian calendar, these terms are at least a small attempt to honor the world’s many religions, cultures, and calendars, while remaining intelligible to a largely English-speaking readership.

<sup>2</sup> To understand the moral and spiritual importance of nonhuman animal exploitation, it is imperative that readers see what happens behind the scenes in animal industries. Such information can be found on many websites, including Vegan Outreach (<http://www.veganoutreach.org/whyvegan/animals.html>), Farm Sanctuary (<http://www.farmsanctuary.org/mediacenter/videos.html>), VIVA! USA (<http://www.vivausa.org/visualmedia/index.html>), VIVA! in the United Kingdom (<http://www.viva.org.uk/>), People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (<http://www.petatv.com/>), the Humane Society (<http://www.humanesociety.org/news/multimedia/>), and Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (<http://www.pcrm.org/resources/>).



scholar, and activist Paul Waldau, when asked, “Which religions are the most animal-friendly?” replied without pause: “All the ones that are listening to their heart” (Waldau, “Animal,” 31).

Waldau notes that religions sometimes move in directions that prompt and motivate the masses toward a great “expansion of justice and ethics” (Waldau, “Guest,” 238). While religions have different worldviews, different prophets and saints, and different conceptions of the spiritual forces of the universe, religions tend to share core *moral* ideals—core conceptions of what is right and wrong, good and bad behavior. This is not surprising given that peoples around the world cannot live in community if they murder, steal, and lie—certain core moral ideals must be upheld in order to maintain social structures (Rachels, 26). Consequently, religions tend to foster moral principles that allow us to live comfortably and peacefully with one another. Whether termed *ahimsa*, *metta*, *karuna*, *ci*, or love, for example, the world’s largest and oldest religious traditions teach people that we must protect the weak and needy from cruelty, exploitation, and indifference. Most of us are aware of these core spiritual teachings and their application with regard to human beings (though we often fail to put this knowledge into action), but few people seem to understand the application of such pervasive religious moral injunctions with regard to fishes and mice, hogs and horses, turkeys and elephants.

## Intent and Focus

There is no *one* Buddhism, and there is no *one* Christianity. There are hundreds of Christian churches, each with its own particular creed, interpretations, traditions, practices, and leaders. First-century Indian Buddhism differs radically from twenty-first-century Japanese Buddhism. Neo-Confucian religious traditions, which began to take shape around 1000 CE, permanently altered the Confucian tradition; Buddhism permanently altered Daoism. Every religious tradition changes across time and place, and so every great religious tradition is rich with diversity.

Religions are notoriously complicated, necessarily so because they endure over vast time periods, travel expansive continents, are transplanted onto distant but well-developed cultures in varied climes, and endure through extensive cultural and political changes. In light of texts and teachings, in light of interpretations and commentaries accumulated over centuries, there is an overwhelming array of attitudes and responses surrounding any given topic among religious traditions. Paul Waldau notes that

over the millennia of their existence, [religious] traditions have provided an astonishing array of views and materials, some of which are in significant tension with each other. Since such diversity leads to challenging problems on virtually any subject . . . it also affects significantly many issues that arise

when one seeks to describe each tradition's views of animals. (Waldau, *Specter*, 3)

In light of this diversity, almost any religious practice or belief might be defended and/or sanctioned by a particular phrase, sentence, isolated story, or obscure document within a given religious tradition's accumulated stories and literature. Given this, how can we reach any worthy conclusions concerning our rightful relations with nonhumans?

*In spite of this diversity of accumulated religious lore, it is possible to locate a preponderance of core teachings that point to a particular moral outlook, which can be discerned by examining texts, the lives of moral exemplars, and long-standing, deep-rooted, foundational religious ideals.* Sometimes the sheer volume of teachings on a given viewpoint will seal the debate. Sometimes *who* offers the moral teachings, or *where* the teachings are recorded, will carry the weight of authority. For example, in the world of Islam, the Qur'an carries more weight than any other text, and words attributed to Muhammad carry more weight than words attributed to any other individual. Though a variety of contending views clutter the airways, some views inevitably prove obscure, or of little importance, because they are found in secondary texts, because they are credited to an individual who carries comparatively less esteem in the religious tradition, or because such a view is an anomaly in a tradition that overwhelmingly supports an opposing point of view. If we are diligent in examining available information, we can reach dependable conclusions regarding core moral teachings.

This book examines a host of indigenous religious traditions and seven of the world's most prosperous and well-represented religions (the Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions). (When I use the term *religions* in this book, I refer specifically to these religions.) This volume does not focus on the many differences *among* branches of a given religion, such as that of Mahayana and Theravada Buddhists, Sunni or Shi'a Muslims, Orthodox or Reform Judaism, or that of Protestant and Catholic Christians. Rather, this work focuses on *core* teachings within each religious tradition that reach across sectarian boundaries, like *ahimsa* in Buddhist traditions or *love* in Christian traditions.

Each chapter of this book is divided into a series of sections. Section headings are not identical across chapters (for example, interpenetrability) because, despite remarkable similarities that lie at the core of religious traditions, each religion is distinct and unique.

"Sacred Nature, Sacred Anymals" (the "y" will soon be explained), focuses on nature generally, exploring religious teachings that instruct people on rightful relations with trees, mountains, soil, and water—ecosystems and the environment—which are essential habitats for nonhuman animals. "Philosophy and Morality" explores specific, core religious teachings that establish rightful relations between humans and all other creatures. Subsequent sections focus on religiously sanctioned relationships between the divine and nonhumans, and relations that are outlined in sacred texts and teachings between humans and nonhumans. The latter topic is



further divided into two categories: nonhumans as individuals in their own right, and spiritual and physical kinship between humans and nonhuman animals.

“Interpenetrability” is particularly important to religious traditions that offer a cyclical vision of life, such as reincarnation/transmigration. In traditions in which individuals might be reborn as an indigo bunting or the tiny, South American Robinson’s mouse opossum, there is no definitive line between Italians, indigo buntings, and mouse opossums—there is no eternal or ultimate distinction between humans and the rest of the animate world. In contrast, religions that do not hold a cyclical vision of life do not generally include species interpenetrability. Consequently, this section is included only in the first four chapters.

“Anymal Powers” examines special abilities that are attributed to nonhumans in sacred stories and literature, including creative powers, spiritual devotion, and special knowledge, such as the ability to assist and teach human beings.

The final section of each chapter focuses on animal activists who are motivated by religious belief. These activists are driven by religious commitments, by their spiritual understanding of what constitutes rightful relations between humans and other creatures, and by their knowledge of how contemporary flesh, entertainment, “lab” animal, and clothing industries violate religiously prescribed rightful relations between humans and nonhuman animals.

### Positive Presentation

*This book focuses on religious teachings that are relevant to animal advocacy.*

In keeping with the moral outlook established in the Axial Age, the time period during which the texts of today’s great religions were formed, today’s major religions continue to be, overall, radically friendly toward nonhuman animals. This book reflects this strong religious/moral tendency without presenting opposing arguments. I do not offer opposing arguments for three reasons.

First, arguments against animal advocacy are easy to come by. Most of us grow up believing that human exploitation of other creatures is religiously sanctioned, and most religious people (whether Buddhist or Christian, Jew or Indigenous) will therefore readily defend their tendency to exploit nonhuman animals, as well as in their community and culture—especially dietary preferences. This tendency is also encouraged and perpetuated by religious leaders. Religious leaders generally share and defend the larger community’s exploitative habits. I do not offer arguments in favor of animal exploitation because others can and will do so; such arguments are easy to come by.

This tendency should neither surprise us nor affect our point of view:

As has happened so often in history when the religious imagination has been called upon to support racist, sexist, and other exclusivism that obviously harmed marginalized humans, religious themes can lend themselves to

obscuring and justifying the marginalization of nonhuman lives. (Waldau, "Guest," 237).

People tend to defend the status quo—their way of life—*whatever* their way of life might be, even when their religion is rich with teachings that convey the importance of radical social change. Force of habit and personal investment in the status quo combine to encourage humanity to turn a blind eye to animal-friendly scriptures. Nonetheless, "religious traditions offer plenty of 'resources' for countering such trends" (Waldau, "Guest," 237). Therefore, the abundant but often ignored resources that lie within each of the world's great religions, which have the power to transform our relations with nonhumans and the earth itself, are rightly the focus of this book.

Second, religious arguments that are commonly posed in favor of exploiting nonhumans are unconvincing in light of a richer understanding of religious teachings, writings, ideals, and exemplars. Such arguments are, generally, both shallow and specific; they run counter to the deepest moral convictions of religious traditions, as this book amply demonstrates. Thankfully, core religious teachings speak against factory farming, and cruel exploitation in general. I encourage readers to ponder what religious arguments might be posed to defend factory farming or animal experimentation in light of the information provided herein. I also encourage readers not to draw any conclusions until they have read the entire book, *including the appendix*.

Third, to include even the most common religious justifications and rationalizations for the exploitation of nonhuman animals in each religious tradition would expand this text considerably. This book is quite long enough—testimony to a rich diversity of animal-friendly teachings from each of the world's most popular religious traditions.

### Ideals, Not Actions

*This book presents religious ideals; this volume does not attempt to explain how people within each religious tradition actually behave, or what they actually believe.*

Compassion is a central teaching of every major religion, but, most people are unaware of how animal industries operate, of how our economic choices either do or do not contribute to intense suffering and uncounted premature deaths. Consequently, religious teachings too often fail to affect what people actually do—what they purchase or consume.

Sacred teachings are no more effective than the knowledge and religious commitment of practitioners. Humans can have an endless supply of noble thoughts, but if they are not accompanied by a call to action, then the ideas themselves are of little value. As it turns out, many religious people proudly claim the idealistic spiritual teachings of their faith, yet simultaneously deny that these teachings apply to their personal choice of foods, clothing, entertainment, or pharmaceuticals. For



example, religious people are likely to agree that compassion is a central tenet of their religious ethics, but that there is nothing cruel about the production and consumption of milk or cottage cheese. Dairy products, they assert, do not require the taking of life, and are therefore neither cruel nor against core religious teachings. Of course it is possible to feed and tend a nursing cow and calf without cruelty and without taking life (by simply sharing a cow's nursing milk with her calf), but this mere possibility has nothing to do with the actual production of cow's milk on dairy farms. Consequently, this possibility cannot justify the consumption of yogurt, cheese, or milk purchased from local grocery stores.

Although most religious people confirm core animal-friendly teachings in their particular religious tradition, even grant that such teachings are foundational, they tend to simultaneously offer a host of reasons to explain why they need not live by these teachings—why they can continue to eat blueberry yogurt and poached cod yet remain consistent with core religious teachings.

Dietary habits are the basis of most arguments posed in defense of animal exploitation. This means that religious arguments in favor of animal exploitation generally have nothing to do with religious convictions or the realities of animal exploitation. Such arguments are almost always rooted in a desire for meaty lasagna or shrimp salad, for example. Furthermore, those who pose such arguments have long believed, without actually looking into the matter, that their religion actually supports their consumption of vanilla yogurt and flounder filets. This misconception is bolstered by common consensus: Pretty much everyone else in their religious community thinks and behaves similarly, consuming flesh, eggs, and dairy products, and believing that their diet is religiously sanctioned.

In contrast, other some religious adherents openly admit that they are unwilling to honor core, animal-friendly religious teachings in their daily lives, usually with regard to diet. Such people admit that they are unwilling to implement religious ideals at the expense of treasured dietary preferences, and because the vast majority of their peers are doing the same, there is little incentive for change.

Martin Luther King Jr. asked whether organized religion was "too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world" (King, 409). Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to offer any meaningful response to the ongoing, egregious exploitation of billions of nonhuman animals? As long as a significant majority continues to support animal exploitation regardless of core religious ideals, most religious people are unlikely to change. As long as few people are willing to challenge common practices, the majority tends to feel free to continue in their habitual way, oblivious of the myriad, devastating affects of their actions. Not one major religion has thus far forcefully challenged *any* factory farming practice (Waldau, "Guest," 234). If religious traditions cannot offer a meaningful response to contemporary moral issues such as that of animal exploitation, they risk being "dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century" (King, 409). In the words of Paul Waldau, "Mainline cultural and intellectual traditions have

debased all other animals" and in the process, we have forsaken our religious obligations and debased ourselves (Waldau, "Guest," 238).

One need only look to the writings of Christians during the Crusades, or to the practice of slavery, to witness the human tendency to justify cruelty in the name of faith—even while continuing to assert that religion is rooted in kindness and generosity (Regan, 106–38). Martin Luther King lamented, "I see the church as the body of Christ. But, oh! How we have blemished and scarred that body through social neglect and through fear of being nonconformists" (King, 408). It is highly likely that future generations will view factory farms and animal experimentation as we now view the Crusades and slavery—as cruel acts committed by those of faith, even in the name of faith, out of ignorance, selfishness, and indifference.

Religions exist, and can only exist, within cultures, in a specific time and place. Racist, sexist, and speciesist tendencies and practices do not indicate a divine sanction of, or the karmic irrelevance of, racism, sexism, or speciesism. Although scriptures have been widely used to justify cruel practices across religious traditions, a preponderance of *core* teachings in every major religious tradition speak against exploitation and cruel domination of any kind. Though this book highlights animal-friendly teachings, it is important to note that the discrepancy between religious teachings and actual practice is often disappointing.

Therefore, *this book can make no claim about actual behavior*—about religious practice—but makes claims only about religious ideals. These chapters do not demonstrate that religious adherents, whether indigenous or Jew, actually *live* in ways that work toward the liberation of nonhuman animals, or even in ways that are sensitive to the lives of other living beings. Yet, ironically, almost all religious people, whether Buddhist or Daoist, Christian or Muslim, are likely to agree that the animal-friendly teachings gathered in this book are central to their religion. How are we to understand this phenomenon of affirmation *and* denial, of granting the truth of religious ideals while shirking responsibility for implementation?

*This book is about what religions teach, not about how religious people live.* In truth, there appears to be embarrassingly little correlation between the two.

## Things We Tend Not to Know

Most of us believe that core teachings in our religion (and religions more generally) do not align with the agenda of animal activists, that religions do not require adherents to rethink their meaty diet. But in reality, religious traditions offer a wealth of moral teachings and spiritual ideals that *surpass animal welfare to align with animal rights and animal liberation*, that reach beyond a vegetarian diet and require adherents to adopt a *vegan* diet. Those who believe otherwise tend to lack information in three critical areas.

First, such people often have no idea what goes on in breeding facilities, on factory farms, in feedlots, on transport trucks, or in slaughterhouses. (This is why



it is critical to read the appendix of this book before drawing any conclusions: Please see the appendix to explore factory farming and the fishing industry.) Most of us do not know what sorts of creatures are used in animal labs, how many non-humans are used, in what ways, or to what end. Collectively, we do not know about the lives and deaths of fox, chinchilla, or mink on fur farms or in leghold traps. We have not seen how pet mills, zoos, or circuses cage, feed, or train nonhuman animals.

To understand the extent of the problem—to understand the moral and spiritual importance of this subject—is it essential to view undercover footage of what happens behind the scenes, of what happens behind the closed doors of factory farms. I encourage readers to explore undercover footage taken in all of these industries, which can be accessed online on many websites, including the following:

- For U.S. footage, visit Mercy for Animals (<http://www.mercyforanimals.org/>) and Compassion Over Killing (<http://www.cok.net/>).
- For Canadian footage, see Canadians for Ethical Treatment of Farm Animals (<http://www.cetfa.com>).
- For Australian footage, visit Animals Australia (<http://www.animalsaustralia.org/>).
- For European footage, see Vier Pfoten (Four Paws) (<http://www.vier-pfoten.org/website/output.php>).
- For footage from France, see Éthique Animaux (<http://www.l214.com/>), Eyes on Animals (<http://eyesonanimals.com/>) and Varkens in Nood (Pigs in Peril) ([http://www.varkensinnood.nl/english\\_.htm](http://www.varkensinnood.nl/english_.htm)).
- For excellent footage from the Netherlands (and for an overall view), see Compassion in World Farming (<http://www.ciwf.org.uk/>).

I also highly recommend these two short online videos:

- *Do They Know It's Christmas?* ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCX7f\\_s1CA4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCX7f_s1CA4))
- *Alec Baldwin Narrates Revised "Eat Your Meat"* (<http://www.petatv.com/tvpopup/Prefs.asp?video=mym2002>)

For more general information about factory farming, also visit these sites:

- Farm Sanctuary (<http://www.farmsanctuary.org/mediacenter/videos.html>)
- HSUS (<http://video.hsus.org/>)
- PCRM (<http://www.pcrm.org/resources/>)
- PETA (<http://www.petatv.com/>)
- Vegan Outreach (<http://www.veganoutreach.org/whyvegan/animals.html>)
- VIVA! USA (<http://www.vivausa.org/visualmedia/index.html>) or VIVA! UK (<http://www.viva.org.uk/>)

Sometimes when people view undercover footage they imagine that these cases are extreme—that they are certainly not representative of the industry more generally. Nothing could be farther from the truth. For example, any time undercover investigators penetrated the locked doors of factory farming they have come away with similar footage. Only when animal industries are prepared for visitors does the footage look different. Even then, it is shocking to watch: Slaughter is inevitably and few industries will allow visitors to witness this process. Slaughter is always more drawn out and riddled with uncertainties than one likes to imagine.

Second, people lack an understanding of—have often not even heard about—speciesism. To fail to notice structurally induced sufferings of Latinos and African-Americans is racist. To be indifferent to white male domination in the U.S. political system is both racist and sexist. Similarly, to turn a blind eye to factory farming is speciesist.

Many societies have progressed in their understanding of how religious teachings inform and guide human relations across races, ages, and sexes, for example, because we understand that racism, ageism, and sexism are extremely hurtful and are therefore morally and spiritually objectionable. Unfortunately, few people understand how religious teachings inform and guide human relations with other species and speak against speciesism. In fact, few people are even aware of the cruel exploitation that stems from our domination of and indifference to other creatures.

Third, we often fail to critically examine conventional spiritual teachings, which we tend to learn young and accept without challenge, even without examination. Those who believe that a particular religion supports the status quo with regard to nonhuman animals have often neglected to examine sacred texts, core teachings, and/or the practical application of religious ideals to assess our current treatment of nonhuman animals.

Foundational religious teachings indicate that our relations with other creatures ought to be compassionate and nonexploitative. Is this overwhelmingly protective, compassionate religious outlook toward nonhumans surprising? Is there a religion that encourages painful and life-destroying exploitation of sentient beings for such paltry reasons as palate or publications, curiosity or convenience? No, and no. Yet people from almost every major religion lack an understanding of contemporary animal industries and animal exploitation; we know little or nothing of speciesism, and precious little about what sacred teachings actually say regarding rightful relations between humans and nonhumans, and so we tend to cite passages from sacred texts, or refer to conventional religious teachings, to support contemporary animal exploitation. Understanding core religious teachings *and* contemporary animal exploitation is critical to grasping why this issue is spiritually important, and why we are compelled to change some of our most basic habits if we adhere to one of the world's most represented religions.

*This book specifically focuses on aspects of religious traditions that protect and value other animals because teachings of compassion are prevalent in all dominant religions, because*



*people tend to be ignorant of the implications of these prevalent teachings with regard to non-human animals, and because this spiritual ignorance causes egregious and ongoing suffering and billions of premature deaths.* I hope that this book offers a deeper, richer understanding of sacred writings and of core religious principles concerning our rightful relations with other creatures. Ultimately, I hope that this book brings positive changes for nonhuman animals. But the reader must ultimately judge: Do the world's most commonly claimed religions support contemporary animal exploitation, or do they not?

### Acceptance, Reform, or Liberation?

There are various ways one might react to ongoing, prevalent animal exploitation (see appendix). In fact, most people react in various ways, and our reactions tend to change as we collect more information, as the weight of new information penetrates and settles into our spiritual consciousness.

One common reaction to new information on the topic of animal exploitation is to simply reaffirm the status quo, to believe—in spite of evidence to the contrary—that all is well on our farms and in our slaughterhouses. Such denial is becoming more difficult as information about factory farming reaches mainstream conscience, as undercover footage finds its way into mainstream media, exposing the horrible truths lurking behind closed doors.

A second common reaction is to admit that there are moral problems inherent in contemporary animal industries, while asserting that exploiting animals is not itself irreligious. Such welfarists often emphasize the need for reform. They may seek larger farrowing crates or a ban on battery hen cages, more fishing regulations or improved fishing technology, and/or an end to particularly painful practices such as debeaking and dehorning. Welfarists look to updated laws and new technology to improve the lives and deaths of exploited animals; they seek to reform animal exploitation.

Still others, on learning about animal exploitation, decide that other creatures do not exist for our purposes, that there is something inherently irreligious about exploiting other sentient beings—especially given that such exploitation is unnecessary to our survival and has even proven to be harmful to our health (as our diet currently is, and as animal experimentation has proven to be) (Anderegg, 18). People who find animal exploitation unacceptable, and who consequently wish to end such practices, are “liberationists” (or “abolitionists”). Liberationists do not want larger farrowing crates, but empty farrowing crates. They do not want fewer trawlers pulling sea life from the seas, but no trawlers pulling sea life from the seas. They do not want an end to debeaking and dehorning, but an end to factory farming. Liberationists often argue that animals do not exist for our purposes, and that it is therefore morally and spiritually wrong for us to use them for our ends, as if they were tools, or a medium of exchange.

If contemporary factory farming runs contrary to spiritual obligation, contrary to scriptures, and contrary to examples set by the world's most frequently claimed

religions and their affiliated moral and spiritual exemplars, then people committed to any one of these religious traditions are obligated, at a minimum, to stop supporting factory farming—to stop buying their products. Denial will not suffice; religious adherents must first and foremost *cease to support these industries*. Alternatively, religious adherents can admit that they are not particularly religious—that they really don't care what their religion teaches, and that they therefore have no intention of changing their way of life based on core religious teachings.

### Atheists and Agnostics

Even an atheist or agnostic is likely to be interested in discovering moral teachings that are remarkably consistent across religious traditions. Even someone who self-defines as entirely outside all religious traditions is likely to be fascinated by the prodigious power that lies behind such consistent moral convictions across time and place, and might therein find reason to ponder human obligations toward, and treatment of, nonhuman animals. When the world's largest and oldest religions come together on a single point of morality, it is likely that we have struck upon something that human beings cannot afford to ignore, something to which we might all aspire, something that is central to who we all aspire to be more generally, whether or not we adhere to any of the world's many religions.

### Words and Social Change

Words help to shape our understanding of the world. Language legitimizes and is made legitimate by those in power, and is therefore rife with “political and ideological investment” (Fairclough, *Critical*, 7). Consequently, language supports and contributes to domination, and is an important medium for social control and a viable method of bringing social change (Fairclough, *Language*, 2–3).

Ludwig Wittgenstein, an influential Austrian philosopher who died in 1951, noted that language is a moral matter, “an activity, or a form of life,” the importance of which should not be overlooked (Wittgenstein, 23). Wittgenstein believed that the job of philosophy is to sort out conceptual confusions that arise when we use language carelessly, or without reflection. He considered the problems that arise from language to be “deep disquietudes,” and philosophy as “a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language” (Wittgenstein, 111, 109). He noted that communication, the use of language in a meaningful manner, is a “speech act”; language “is not simply a mirror of life, it is the doing of life itself” (Gergen, 35).

Wittgenstein recognized language as a human creation. Wittgenstein therefore also recognized language as arbitrary, as an imperfect reflection of reality, not an inherent phenomenon of the universe.



A popular introductory text for linguistics includes “a cartoon in which two disgruntled cavemen are attempting to converse. One says to the other: ‘f w wnt tlk rilly gd, w’ll hv t nvnt vwls’” (Cameron, 1). This comic reminds readers that people do not just *use* language; “they comment on the language they use. Frequently they find it wanting and, like the cavemen, propose to improve it” (Cameron, 1). Language is not static; it is created and recreated by those who speak and write. New terms such as *quark* or *black hole* describe a more recent human understanding of the universe. Fifty years ago *Internet* and *megabyte* were not part of our vocabulary. Meanwhile, *whither*, *nigh*, and *thee* have become obsolete.

Humans need never be stymied by a lack of words; we simply create what we need. But through our created words, language reflects culture and society, and simultaneously maintains a particular, established way of thinking. Our choice of words is an active process, and the words we choose make a statement beyond surface meanings. We produce language, we give it meaning, and we affirm or challenge each word by accepting or rejecting that word. Consequently, our use of language can either aid or hinder change.

Because words carry more than surface meaning, choosing new words is an important tool in the process of changing thought (Fairclough, *Critical*, 3). Someone—or likely many people—were behind the purposeful selection of *African American* as a group indicator. *Darkie*, *Pickinini*, and *colored* are obsolete. *Nigger* has shifted from common use to either rare and extremely contentious, or friendly insider jargon, like *queer*. Feminists have also employed verbal activism. Most contemporary textbooks from Western nations no longer refer only to men, but use both feminine and masculine pronouns. Feminists continue to put pressure on those speaking in public to think about the meanings and affects of words. Sexist labels, like *chick* or *broad*, are more and more apt to turn heads, or to illicit a negative or questioning response. In many contemporary social circles, sexist words bring on confrontation and/or alienation.

Words are a form of activism. A speaker or writer who chooses words carefully can bring listeners and readers to ponder the words they read or hear.

By calling traditional usages into question, reformers effectively force everyone who uses a particular language to declare a position in respect of sexism, racism, speciesism, and so on. Language reformers provide a new array of word options: For example, a speaker can say, “Ms. A. is the chair(person)” and convey approval of language that is sex-inclusive, or a speaker can say “Miss A. is the chairman” and convey a more conservative attitude about language and sex. What a speaker can no longer do is to select either alternative and convey by it nothing more than “a certain woman holds a particular office.” Choices as to how we word such sentences have removed the option of political neutrality (Cameron, 119). One either conveys ignorance, indifference, or conservatism, or an acceptance of sex-inclusive language.

When confronted with a new term, we are simultaneously confronted with the *reason* for that term, and we must decide whether or not we will accept or reject

this new word. We *must* choose. And in the process, we are confronted with social justice issues. Consequently, the success of a new word is not measured by its frequency of use, but by its ability to bring people to question conventional language. A new word elicits dialogue whether or not it is widely accepted into a community's vocabulary.

The words we choose are morally important; careless use of words is therefore morally objectionable. Intellectual and moral progress can be aided by thoughtful, accurate word choices, and by challenging words and the way others use language (Rorty, 9).

Consequently, I have chosen to alter a few common English language practices throughout this book. For example, I do not refer to nonhuman animals as "that" or "it" any more than I would do so in reference to a human being. Nor do I use the word "animal" as if it excluded *Homo sapiens*.

### Lexical Gaps

The "highest value to which language-users can aspire is accuracy" (Cameron, 135). *Lexical gaps* are concepts or concrete items in our world that do not have adequate (or any) verbal representation. Lexical gaps hinder effective communication: How will we talk about poodles if we do not have the word *poodle*? Linguistic accuracy is therefore dependent on word availability, on an accumulation of words that *say* what we *mean*.

There is no word in the English language to describe the category "every animal outside of the speaker's species." For scholars and activists involved in animal rights, animal ethics, and animal liberation, this lexical gap is problematic. The use of *animals* as if it referred only to nonhumans is inappropriate because humans are animals—primates, mammals. As a result, several word combinations have emerged to fill this lexical gap, including *nonhuman animal*, *other animals*, *other-than-human animals*, and *animals other than humans*, but when writing or speaking specifically about nonhuman animals, such terms quickly become cumbersome. Nonetheless, authors and lecturers currently speaking and writing on subjects such as animal law or animal minds must use these cumbersome concoctions if they are to remain accurate in their speech and writing.

### Dualism

Makeshift word combinations (like *nonhuman animal*) are inadequate not only because they are cumbersome, but also because they are dualistic. *Nonhuman*, for example, artificially divides animals "into two seemingly opposed categories: humans and everyone else" (Adams, *Pornography*, 39–40).

Dualism encourages people to assume that one category is the norm (white, male, human, or Christian, for example), while opposites (brown, female, animal,



non-Christian) are assumed to be inferior and less desirable (Adams, *Pornography* 50). Dualistic thinking stirs up division and competition, contention and malevolence, and is therefore proven to be problematic racially, sexually, environmentally, and religiously.

Although this may not be a *necessary* outcome of dualism, it has been a very *real* outcome. Whichever sex, religion, race, or species has not been envisioned as the norm—at the top of the hierarchy—has too often been considered lesser, even exploitable, whether for free labor or scientific experimentation. Consequently, dualistic terms such as *nonhuman animal*, *other-than-human animals*, and *other animals* are likely to perpetuate Western dualisms, hierarchies, and exploitation, and are therefore undesirable both morally and linguistically.

### “Anymal”

As a means of simultaneously filling a lexical gap and avoiding cumbersome, dualistic, or speciesist language, I use the word *anymal* throughout this text. *Anymal* (pronounced “enē-məl”) is a contraction of *any* and *animal*, and is pronounced just as the words *any* and *mal* (in *animal*) are pronounced.

*Anymal* refers to *all* animals, unique and diverse, marvelous and complex, colorful and common, who do not happen to be the same species as the speaker—whatever species the speaker may be. *Anymal* is therefore a shortened version of “any animal that does not happen to be the species that I am.” In this book, the speaker/author is a human being, so *anymal* refers to any animal who is not a human being. Similarly, if a chimp signs *anymal*, all human beings will be included in this term, but she and the rest of her species will not.

*Anymal* is short and simple, easy to pronounce, easy to remember, and is neither speciesist (placing humans in a separate category from all other animals) nor dualistic (employing the fundamentally dualistic terms *non* and *other*).

*Anymal* provides an alternative referent that is consistent with biology; people *are* animals—mammals and primates. We have fallen into the speciesist habit of thinking that we are not animals, perhaps in part due to a prejudiced and ill-informed view of other creatures as savage beasts combined with an inflated sense of humans as uniquely civilized. This situation is, no doubt, made worse by our lack of a simple word to convey the category “all other animals.” We are in need of a word to talk about rabbits and rattlesnakes, gophers and grackles—all species of the world excluding the speaker or author.

As Wittgenstein noted, language effects actions. How we *label* other living beings affects our relationship with other creatures (Rorty, 192). In short, how “we speak about other animals is inseparable from the way we treat them” (Dunayer, 9). Using *animal* incorrectly—using *animal* to refer only to “other” species—ignores shared similarities and falsely distances people from bald uakaris and Chinese crocodile lizards. By distancing ourselves, we allow ourselves to imagine that unnecessary

suffering and forced premature death—though recognized as dreadful among human beings—is somehow just and right for Amazon River Salmon and krsko-polje pigs. In this way, linguistic dishonesty helps to enable human disregard for the suffering that we cause nonhuman animals (Adams, “Foreword,” x), and has encouraged us to treat other creatures as commodities, spare parts, Petri dishes—things expendable for human ends.

Language ought to reflect the truth—humans are animals. *Anymal* does so while simultaneously opening dialogue, encouraging each of us to think about how we use *animal*, and *why* we often and unknowingly use this word as if it did not include humanity. Misusing *animal* in this way perpetuates exploitation and abuse of animals because it helps humanity to imagine that we are not *animals* who are similar to pigs and turkeys in morally relevant ways—most specifically in our ability to suffer and our desire to be left alone to live our own lives. When we speak honestly, when we use appropriate terms, when we speak in a way that reflects what is true biologically, we are more apt to see ourselves as individual animals, and we can then understand that the green acouchi, spot-crowned barbet, and metallic blue guppy are also individuals.

Using language correctly—acknowledging that we are included in the scientific definition of what it is to be an animal—reminds us of morally relevant similarities across species and thereby helps us to maintain rightful relations with gorky geese, southern Viscachas, northern water snakes, and Azores cattle—the larger animal world. *Anymal* forces speakers to choose—or reveal their ignorance—regarding word choice and speciesism. In the process, dialogue is sparked on the subject of animal exploitation. This topic, in turn, will help us to rethink our religious commitments, our rightful place as animals among animals.